

John Locke's Highland Critic

ALAN P. F. SELL, M.A., B.D., Ph.D., F.S.A., F.R.Hist.S.

Although remembered and studied more for his philosophy than for his writings on the Bible, John Locke was influential in urging that biblical books should be read whole, and that texts should be studied in their contexts, and not as isolated "proofs". That he did not always apply his method efficiently is the complaint of James Fraser, whose posthumous criticisms appeared more than seventy years after Locke's death.

James Fraser (1700-1769)¹ was a son of the manse at Alness, Ross-shire, where his father John (d. 1711) was minister. On graduating from Aberdeen University in 1678, Fraser senior embarked upon an eventful career. In 1679 or 1680 he was persecuted, presumably because of his radical views, and in the latter year he went to lodge with an Anabaptist in London. He attended Anabaptist meetings, and was so impressed by the faith of his new-found friends that he contemplated formal membership of the group. The minister, however, persuaded him that there might be work for him to do in his native land, and there the matter rested. One day in 1684, whilst Alexander Shiels was preaching, he and Fraser were seized and taken, manacled, to Edinburgh *via* Leith. There the two were separated, and Fraser was committed to Dunottar castle on 18 May 1685.

Fraser had meanwhile married and his wife, Mrs Jean Moffat — daughter of a Tweeddale family — was also of the dissenting kind. On one occasion, her father had paid a fine of 1,000 merks on her behalf: she had absented herself from the parish church without good cause. After three months in prison, Fraser and his wife were among a hundred people given to the laird of Pitlochrie. They were despatched to New Jersey, enduring a harrowing journey during which fever victims were thrown overboard three or four at a time. By some sort of rough justice Pitlochrie and his wife were among the victims. The voyage lasted for seven weeks, from September to December 1685, and some fifty people died *en route*.

The Frasers were freed in New Jersey, and John was licensed to preach at Waterbury. After the "happy revolution" of 1689 they

¹ The sources for the lives of Fraser and his father are *DNB*; Scott's *Fasti* v, 291-2; A. Fraser, "A short account of the author", prefixed to *The Scripture Doctrine of Sanctification* (Edinburgh, 1774); John Kennedy, *The Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire* (Edinburgh, 2nd edn. 1861), 34-9, reprinted by Christian Focus Publications (Inverness, 1979).

returned to Scotland, where Fraser was ordained on 23 December 1691. His first parish was at Glencorse, Dalkeith, and whilst there he made occasional forays into the Highlands to preach in Gaelic. Eventually he was called to become minister at Alness, but the southern church courts refused to sustain the call, and a new church building was erected at Glencorse. In the following year, Alness appealed to the General Assembly, and on the day before it met the new building at Glencorse was razed to the ground. It appears that this piece of prophetic symbolism sufficed to secure the removal of John Fraser to Alness in 1696. There he remained until his death on 5 November 1711, his eldest son predeceasing him by one year.

James Fraser was born in 1700, and any excitement in his life was more intellectual than physical. He was licensed by the Presbytery of Chanonry on 6 November 1723, and ordained on 17 February 1726. He became minister at Alness, where he remained until his death on 5 October 1769. It would seem that some local lairds organised opposition to his settlement in the parish, but the elders and communicants staunchly supported him. Even so, the induction service took place in a corner of the graveyard, for the church doors were shut and guarded against the new minister. Appeals by his opponents to Synod and thence to the General Assembly failed, and Fraser was confirmed in his charge.

Fraser, we are told, excelled in preaching "the law", and in appealing for conversion, he neglected the edification of his flock. Consequently, "Many were awakened under his ministry, but some of these went elsewhere to get healing for their wounds".² In fact they went to Kilmuir-Easter, where John Porteous was minister. When Porteous expressed his concern at this Fraser replied,

My dear brother, . . . when my Master sent me forth to my work, He gave me a quiver full of arrows, and He ordered me to cast these arrows at the hearts of his enemies till the quiver was empty. I have been endeavouring to do so, but the quiver is not empty yet. When the Lord sent you forth, He gave you a cruse of oil, and His orders to you were, to pour the oil on the wounds of broken-hearted sinners, till the cruse was empty. Your cruse is no more empty than is my quiver. Let us both then continue to act on our respective orders, and as the blessing from on high shall rest on our labours, I will be sending my hearers with wounded hearts to Kilmuir, and you will be sending them back to Alness rejoicing in the Lord.

To which Porteous replied, "Be it so, my beloved brother".³

Whatever deficiencies there may have been in his preaching the verdict which comes down to us is that "his public ministrations

² J. Kennedy, *op. cit.*, 35.

³ *Ibid.*, 36-7.

were highly edifying and contained rich entertainment for the learned as well as the unlearned".⁴ He was meek, and of a quiet spirit; he was "a kind and indulgent husband, a steady friend, and faithful counsellor".⁵ If Kennedy is to be believed Fraser was a saint in more senses than one; for this "kind and indulgent husband" married Jean MacLeod (d. 13 March, 1778), of whom we are informed that "A cold, unfeeling, bold, unheeding, worldly woman was his wife". She well-nigh starved him, and a friend would leave food at a secret place on one of his walks. He shivered, fireless and without light in his study on the coldest of winter evenings. On one occasion, at a Presbytery dinner, a "moderate" minister jokingly proposed a toast to the wives of the assembled company, and said that he was *sure* that Fraser would join in. Fraser's reply took them all by surprise:

"So I will, and so I ought . . . for mine has been a better wife to me than any one of yours has been to you." "How so?" they all exclaimed. "She has sent me", was his reply, "seven times a day to my knees, when I would not otherwise have gone, and that is more than any of you can say of yours".⁶

Kennedy records that when the elders of the church approached the manse on learning of their minister's death, Mrs Fraser coldly directed them to the room where the body lay, and continued feeding the chickens in the yard.⁷

Fraser's substantial volume on sanctification was published posthumously in 1774. Its full title provides a comprehensive description of its contents: *The Scripture Doctrine of Sanctification, Being a critical Explication, and Paraphrase of the sixth and seventh Chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, and the four first Verses of the eighth Chapter. Wherein The true Scope and Sense of that most important and much disputed Context is cleared and asserted, against the false Interpretation of Grotius, Hammond, Locke, Whitby, Taylor, Alexander, &c. With a large Appendix, Wherein the Apostle's Doctrine, Principles, and Reasoning, are applied to the Purposes of holy Practice, and of evangelical Preaching.*

Our purpose is to examine the points at issue between Fraser and Locke. First, however, a reminder of Locke's approach to biblical interpretation will be in order.

Locke's titles — and especially their negative implications — are sometimes very revealing. Thus, the full title of his celebrated work on *The reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) is completed by the words, *as delivered by the scriptures*. This is a clear signal that

⁴ A. Fraser, *op. cit.*, viii.

⁵ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁶ J. Kennedy, *op. cit.*, 38.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Locke is *not* going to be influenced by traditional interpretations, and that he will espouse these only if they are, in his eyes, first scriptural. His policy is not to view the Christian faith through credal or dogmatic spectacles. As he wrote in *A vindication of the reasonableness of Christianity &c. from Mr Edwards's Reflections*: "The making of Religions and Creeds I leave to others. I only set down the Christian Religion, as I find our Saviour and his Apostles preached it, and preached it to, and left it for the *ignorant and unlearned Multitude*".⁸ Similarly, when he comes to write *An Essay for the understanding of St Paul's Epistles, by consulting St Paul himself* the last five words (though they would have been *four* had Locke been scrupulously scriptural at this point — custom sometimes overtakes the most rational!) make his intention clear.

Standing as we do on our side of modern biblical criticism a question immediately arises: How far is it possible for us to opt out of our history, to abandon our presuppositions, and to come face to face with Paul or any other person from the past? It would seem that such a leap is impossible, and evidence for its impossibility may be found by comparing Locke with Richard Baxter. Where Locke, having brought reason, or common sense, to bear upon the scriptures concluded to Jesus as Messiah, Baxter, after a similar process of investigation, retained rather more of the traditional affirmations of Christianity.⁹

Locke's paraphrases on Paul's letters to the Galatians, Corinthians, Romans and Ephesians appeared posthumously, and were collected into one volume in 1707. Two Presbyterian divines continued his work: James Peirce of Newbury and afterwards of Exeter whence he was ejected for Arianism in 1717, published Colossians, Philippians and Hebrews (1725-7); and George Benson, Edmund Calamy's protégé, completed Paul's letters and the catholic epistles (1731-49).¹⁰

Locke begins his *Essay* with the admission that although he had been familiar with Paul's letters he had never understood "the doctrinal and discursive parts of them".¹¹ He offers a number of reasons for his difficulty:

1. Letter writers frequently assume rather than state much which is common knowledge as between them and their readers.
2. Paul often answers letters which he had received, but which we have not seen.

⁸ J. Locke, *Works* (1714), ii, 552.

⁹ See further, A. P. F. Sell, "Arminians, deists and reason", *Faith and Freedom*, xxiii (1979), 19-31.

¹⁰ Peirce and Benson are in *DNB*.

¹¹ J. Locke, *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St Paul . . . to which is prefixed an Essay on the understanding of St Paul's epistles by consulting St Paul himself* (1824), iii.

3. The Greek language is foreign to us and, furthermore, the idiom is Hebrew or Syriac.
4. The ideas to be conveyed are wholly new.
5. Paul's temperament is such that ideas tumble from him, and his mind forges ahead of his pen: hence the parentheses and breaks in argument.
6. Paul often writes in other voices, so that "I" can mean himself, any Christian, any Jew, any man.
7. Paul sometimes introduces and answers objections without structurally marking what he is doing.
8. We do not know always precisely to whom he speaks, or what circumstances he has in mind.
9. The divisions into chapters and verses is arbitrary and disruptive. This difficulty is exacerbated by the practice of reading only fragments at a time, and of taking verses out of context. This gives rise to [what we would nowadays call] eisegesis: "there are fewer that bring their opinions to the sacred scripture, to be tried by that infallible rule, than bring the sacred scripture to their opinions, to bend it to them, to make it, as they can, a cover and guard to them".¹²
10. Paul's letters have become so much a part of the English language that our very familiarity with their language may beguile us into thinking, mistakenly, that we understand it.

Locke next considers the way in which commentators differ among themselves. This does not make their work redundant, but it makes it essential that we go back to Paul himself. Such going back will not confer infallibility upon us, but it may lead us towards the true meaning of the text. Locke's method has been to read the whole text through at one sitting — and this on more than one occasion — in order that the general drift of a letter become clear. We are helped by Paul's consistent understanding of the gospel which runs like a thread through his work and helps us to grasp his meaning. This, then, is Locke's method of coming to terms with Paul, whose writings were "dictated" by the Spirit of God. Dictated they may have been, but they must also commend themselves to Locke's reason: "If I must believe for myself, it is unavoidable, that I must understand for myself. For if I blindly, and with an implicit faith, take the pope's interpretation of the sacred scripture, without examining whether it be Christ's meaning; it is the pope I believe in, and not in Christ".¹³

Locke's *failure* to observe Paul's intention and scope in *Romans* v 1 to vii 8 is the nub of Fraser's charge against him. Locke understands chapters v and vi to be addressed to Gentile converts only and not also to Jewish converts; he understands chapter vii in

¹² *Ibid.*, ix.

¹³ *Ibid.*, xxii.

the opposite way. Consider *Romans* iv 20-v 1, which conclude Paul's present reference to Abraham:

iv 20: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. 21. And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. 22. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. 23. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; 24. But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; 25. Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

v 1: Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Locke's view is that the last three verses of *Romans* iv refer to Gentiles, not to Jews, and that accordingly the "Therefore" of v 1 introduces an inference drawn therefrom. The "we" in verse 1 must likewise mean "we gentiles that are not under the law". Locke's ground is that in the preceding chapter Paul has proved "that the promise was not to the jews alone, but to the gentiles also: and that justification was, not by the law, but by faith, and consequently designed for the gentiles, as well as the jews".¹⁴

Fraser counters that the "we" and the "therefore" refer to Jews and Gentiles without distinction; further, that the things in which Locke says the *Gentiles* may glory (v 1-11) are identical with those in which Jewish converts may glory.¹⁵ Indeed, in his comment on verse 11 Locke admits that "the convert gentiles had whereof to glory, as well as the Jews".¹⁶ "Doubtless, as well as the Jews", retorts Fraser: "why then not understand what is there of believing Jews and Gentiles?"¹⁷ Fraser goes on to deny that verse 8, "God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us", applies exclusively to Gentile

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 316. For Locke's assertion that *Romans* vii is addressed to converts from the Jewish nation only see *ibid.*, 342.

¹⁵ J. Fraser, *The Scripture Doctrine of Sanctification*, 2-3. Fraser is here in the line of interpretation which had been popularised in Philip Doddridge's *The Family Expositor* (1739-56). On the phrase, "we have peace with God" (Rom. v 1) Doddridge writes: "It seems very unreasonable to suppose, that when the apostle wrote such passages as this . . . he should mean to exclude himself, who was no Gentile. . . . I must beg leave to refer my reader [to the postscript to the preface of my Sermons on Regeneration], and hope I shall be excused from a more particular examination of that very different scheme of interpretation, which Mr Taylor has so laboriously attempted to revive. The main principles of it are, I think, well confuted by my pious and worthy friend Dr Guyse, in the preface to his paraphrase of this epistle". John Guyse's *Romans* appeared in his *Practical Exposition* (1739-52). Doddridge (1702-51), Guyse (1680-1761) and John Taylor (1694-1761) are in *DNB*.

¹⁶ Locke, *op. cit.*, 320.

¹⁷ Fraser, *op. cit.*, 6.

converts, or that they alone are described by the epithets “without strength”, “ungodly”, “sinners”, and “enemies”.¹⁸ The underlying fault in Locke is that he is unduly influenced by his view that in the first eleven chapters of *Romans* Paul speaks only of Jewish and Gentile *nations*. Locke is adamant on this point: “If it were remembered that St Paul all along, through the eleven first chapters of this epistle, speaks nationally of the jews and gentiles, as it is visible he does, and not personally of single men, there would be less difficulty, and fewer mistakes, in understanding this epistle”.¹⁹ Fraser concedes the national reference in chapters ix-xi, but not in i-viii.²⁰ He demonstrates his point by reference to Romans iii 19, 20, 23 and, concerning justification, to iii 22, 28.

iii 19: Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

20: Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

23: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

iii 22: Even the righteousness of God [without the law is manifested] which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believes; . . .

28: Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

In every case, he declares, the reference is to every single person.²¹

What especially disturbs Fraser is that Locke’s interpretation “deprives Christians singly and personally of the special consolations belonging to them as true believers, justified by faith, and turns all to a matter of external and common privilege”.²² The upshot is that “Mr L’s notion having no good reason to support it, it can make no solid foundation for the superstructure which Mr Taylor of Norwich has raised upon it”.²³

Fraser’s second major criticism of Locke arises in connection with the latter’s interpretation of *Romans* vii 8, 9:

“vii 8: But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.

¹⁸ Cf. Doddridge, *op. cit.*, on Rom. v 6: “By *ungodly* here, Mr Locke understands Gentiles; as also by *weak*, *sinners*, *enemies*, &c. They are undoubtedly included; but it seems very inconsistent with the whole strain of the apostle’s argument in the preceding chapters, to confine it to them. . . . I therefore all along explain such passages in the most extensive sense.”

¹⁹ J. Locke, *op. cit.*, 317.

²⁰ J. Fraser, *op. cit.*, 17-18.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

²² *Ibid.*, 22.

²³ *Ibid.*, 33.

9: For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.”

Locke paraphrases these verses as follows: “Nevertheless sin, taking opportunity, during the law, or whilst I was under the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence: for without the law, sin is dead, not able to hurt me; And there was a time once, when I being without the law, was in a state of life; but the commandment coming, sin got life and strength again, and I found myself a dead man”.²⁴ He comments:

Ποτὲ, “once”. St Paul declares there was a time once, when he was in a state of life. When this was, he himself tells us, viz. when he was without the law, which could only be, before the law was given. For he speaks here, in the person of one of the children of Israel, who never ceased to be under the law, since it was given. This Ποτὲ therefore must design the time between the covenant made with Abraham, and the law. By that covenant, Abraham was made blessed, i.e. delivered from death. That this is so, see Gal. iii 9, &c. And, under him, the israelites claimed the blessing, as his posterity, comprehended in that covenant, and as many of them, as were of the faith of their father, faithful Abraham, were blessed with him. But when the law came, and they put themselves wholly into the covenant of works, wherein each transgression of the law became mortal, then sin recovered life, again, and a power to kill; and an israelite, now under the law, found himself in a state of death, a dead man. Thus we see it corresponds with the design of the apostle’s discourse here. In the six first verses of this chapter, he shows the jews that they were at liberty from the law, and might put themselves solely under the terms of the gospel. In the following part of this chapter, he shows them, that it is necessary for them to do so; since the law was not able to deliver them from the power, sin had to destroy them, but subjected them to it. This part of the chapter showing at large what he says, ch. viii 3, and so may be looked on as an explication and proof of it.²⁵

In “An Essay concerning the penal sanction of the law, in view to the notion of Mr Locke, and of some others, concerning that subject”, Fraser denies that Paul’s reference here is to the Mosaic promulgation of the law, and points out that Locke’s error has been followed by Drs Whitby and Taylor.²⁶ Similarly, Locke is faulted for his interpretation of *Romans* v 14:

²⁴ J. Locke, *op. cit.*, 347-8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 348-9.

²⁶ J. Fraser, *op. cit.*, 203-4. For Daniel Whitby (1638-1726) see *DNB*.

Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.

Here Locke avers:

In this verse St Paul proves, that all men became mortal, by Adam's eating the forbidden fruit, and by that alone, because no man can incur a penalty, without the sanction of a positive law, declaring and establishing that penalty; but death was annexed, by no positive law, to any sin, but the eating the forbidden fruit: and therefore men's dying, before the law of Moses, was purely in consequence of Adam's sin, in eating the forbidden fruit; and the positive sanction of death annexed to it, an evident proof of man's mortality coming from thence.²⁷

To which Fraser replies:

It gives me concern to see a man, who writ so accurately and judiciously on divers subjects, fall into such absence of thought and reason as to be capable of writing at this rate. . . . Upon the whole, it has been sufficiently proved, that the law of God, which is the rule of duty to all men in common, hath at all times, and with regard to men of all nations, been fenced with a penal sanction, which adjudged death to transgressors; even death in all the extent of meaning, that hath been here shown from the scripture. So that we may now be satisfied, how destitute of all foundation in scripture or reason, is the conceit of Mr Locke expressed in his paraphrase and note on Rom. vii 8 where he says, that without the law (of Moses) sin could not hurt a man, or bring death upon him: and his notion, that since the fall mankind were not under a law threatening death for transgression, until the law, given by Moses; which was given only to Israel.²⁸

John Macleod declared that in taking Locke to task as he did Fraser was dealing with what is now "an extinct volcano".²⁹ Certainly the dust has long since settled on the arguments we have been considering. Modern commentators on *Romans*, far from countering Locke's view, do not find it necessary to refer to it. Most biblical scholars would nowadays find Locke conservative (a

²⁷ J. Locke, *op. cit.*, 325.

²⁸ J. Fraser, *op. cit.*, 206, 232. Fraser adds (207), "Even Dr Taylor ventures to say, that here Mr Locke has a wild conceit" — Locke *must* have been way off course!

²⁹ John MacLeod, *Scottish Theology in relation to Church History since the Reformation* (1943; reprinted Edinburgh, 1974), 329.

Spirit-dictated scripture, a pre-critical approach), and Fraser equally so. But Locke bequeathed an important legacy in his insistence that we take an over-all view of biblical writings. This was to challenge the wresting of “proof texts” from their contexts which had been the standard procedure in biblical and dogmatic studies alike. There can be little doubt that on the particular issues with which Fraser was concerned Locke’s Highland critic is victorious: Locke applies his own method less than perfectly in these instances. But the tone for the future was set by Locke, whose biblical work Philip Doddridge accurately appraised thus: “I own I cannot fall in with his exposition of many particular texts; but I have very little to except against his general scheme, and his division of the matter, which seems to me to throw an additional light upon the whole”.³⁰

This is not to say that Locke’s victory was immediate or complete. To this day the name of Fraser of Alness lives in some Highland memories, and we need not suppose that old Hugh Ross was the only one to recall “solid truths” that he had heard “from Mr Fraser in the Church of Alness 70 years ago”.³¹ Moreover, in 1709, the very year in which Locke’s *Paraphrases* were posthumously published, Matthew Henry’s *Commentary*, in the traditional style, first appeared. It is safe to speculate that in the late twentieth century, for every time that Locke is mentioned in a sermon, Henry is quoted a hundred times.

If we are tempted to think that Fraser is over-anxious in his criticisms of Locke, we should review the *strategy* of *The Scripture Doctrine of Sanctification* as a whole, and remind ourselves that its context is the eighteenth-century Evangelicals *versus* Moderates debate. No doubt, Friedhelm Voges was right to advise this Society that the two parties were more akin in apologetic and exegetical method, and in dogmatic and political views than has commonly been supposed.³² It cannot be denied, however, that many in those days felt that a battle was on, or that some Evangelicals would have regarded the satirist’s description of Moderates as a literally descriptive set of statements:

I do believe in stone and lime, a manse of large dimensions,
Broad acres for a glebe and farm; that is my church extension.
My folk may perish if they like — Christ’s name I rarely mention;
I take the stipend due by right to men of good intention.³³

³⁰ Philip Doddridge, *Correspondence and Diary*, ed. J. D. Humphrys, i, 428.

³¹ Noble, *Religious Life in Ross*, 53; quoted by John MacInnes, *The Evangelical Movement in the Highlands of Scotland, 1688 to 1800* (Aberdeen, 1951), 117.

³² Friedhelm Voges, “Moderate and Evangelical thinking in the later eighteenth century: differences and shared attitudes”, *Records of Scottish Church History Society*, xxii pt. 2 (1985), 141-157.

³³ Quoted by G. N. M. Collins, *Whose Faith Follow* (Edinburgh, 1943), 26.

It thus seems quite clear that in *Sanctification* a strategy is at work, the lines are being drawn. This suggestion is borne out by the fact that sympathisers thought it worthwhile to publish Fraser's *Sanctification* six years after his death, fifteen years after Taylor's death, and seventy years after Locke's death. Fraser is on the side of the angels, and the angels are the Evangelicals. Over against them are ministers who "have gone far in the way to a sort of philosophical Heathenism, borrowing from the gospel revelation what they think fit for adorning and recommending their new form of Heathenism".³⁴ The ministers concerned have been "hijacked" by such divines as the controversial Daniel Whitby (1638-1726) for whom faith was but a matter of intellectual assent to the truth of the gospel, and who became by degrees a "unitarian"; and John Taylor of Norwich (1694-1761), whose *Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin* (1740) attacked Calvinistic anthropology, and whose *Key to the Apostolic Writings* (1745) — on which the influence of Locke is clear — revealed him as having, from the Evangelical point of view, a reductionist view of the atonement. Moreover, Taylor had in 1737 rallied to the defence of James Sloss of Nottingham whose fellow-dissenters had excommunicated him for heterodoxy *vis-à-vis* the Trinity. Now Sloss had been a pupil of John Simson (1668?-1740) of Glasgow; Simson was often suspected of heresy, though never convicted of it; and Glasgow was the very university which, in 1756, conferred its D.D. upon Taylor.³⁵

An alert Highland Evangelical could hardly have failed to notice how a chain of events including the Salters' Hall controversy of 1719 and a string of personalities among whom Taylor was prominent, were conspiring to take English Presbyterianism in a unitarian direction.³⁶ He might even have heard of the appeal of

³⁴ J. Fraser, *op. cit.*, 510. F. Voges (*art. cit.* 142) reminds us of the two senses of both "Evangelical" and "Moderate" in eighteenth-century Scotland. More narrowly the former meant "against patronage", the latter "pro patronage". More widely (and more elusively) they signified differing intellectual stances. We are here concerned with the latter, though it is interesting to note that Fraser became implicated in a local "anti-patronage" squabble which developed when in 1752 the crown presented the Rev. Patrick Grant to the vacant charge of Nigg. The parishioners rebelled and formed their own congregation, thus swelling the ranks of seceder Praying Societies first recorded in 1738. Fraser thus found himself baptising the infants of the disaffected. When Grant protested Fraser threatened to build a chapel on his own land at Nigg. It is said that Fraser eventually suggested that the Nigg seceders apply for membership of the Antiburgher Presbytery of Perth. This they did, being received in 1764. See John MacKay, *The Church in the Highlands* (London, 1914), 211-212; William Mackelvie, *Annals and Statistics of the United Presbyterian Church* (Edinburgh 1873), 254-5; Noble, *Religious Life in Ross*, 168; Robert Small, *History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church from 1733 to 1900* (Edinburgh, 1904), i, 630-32.

³⁵ Whitby, Taylor and Simson are in *DNB*.

³⁶ See C. G. Bolam *et al.*, *The English Presbyterians* (London, 1968).

April 1763 by 31 orthodox dissenters of Kendal to the Antiburgher Presbytery of Edinburgh. With evidence of the "Socinian blight" all around them they prayed "that ministers might be sent to preach the gospel in Kendal".³⁷

Most of the liberal leaders displayed a clear and often an acknowledged indebtedness to Locke, to whose principle of bringing calm reason to bear upon the scriptures was attributed much of the rot that was deemed to be setting in. Locke was studied especially in the English dissenting academies. The Presbyterians Joshua Oldfield (London) Thomas Dixon (Whitehaven) and Samuel Jones (Tewkesbury) all used him, as did the Independents John Jennings (Kibworth) and Philip Doddridge (Northampton). It was, for example, under Matthew Warren at Taunton that Henry Grove drank deeply of Locke; and when the undogmatic Grove himself later took charge of the Taunton Academy he "spawned" (to use an opposition term) such "Socianizers" as Micaijah Towgood (1700-1792).³⁸

But the reference to Philip Doddridge's use of Locke recalls his balanced appraisal of the philosopher's biblical work quoted earlier: sympathy with the general approach, criticism of points of detail. Fraser might have been more reserved concerning Locke, but he certainly regarded Doddridge as a safe guide; and Doddridge in turn approved of the refutation on points of detail of John Taylor by his friend John Guyse.³⁹

Perhaps the truth is that in something as inherently mysterious as theology absolute polarities are never easy to maintain. "Angels" — even Evangelical ones — can err, and "sinners" can surprise us by their insight and sincerity.

For a final verdict on Locke's Highland critic we may turn to Robert Haldane (1764-1842), whose exposition of *Romans* in Geneva in 1816 fed the revival there. With reference to Fraser's comments on *Romans* Haldane writes, "A man of God so deeply acquainted with the human heart, and so advanced in the Divine life as this writer evidently was, is a much better judge of the import of this chapter than a mere critic, however distinguished for talents and learning. To eminent godliness, Mr Frazer [*sic*] added profound penetration and remarkable discrimination — qualities in which many critics, who attempt to expound the Scripture, are greatly deficient".⁴⁰ No doubt — but it takes more than "mere" godliness to make a competent exegete.

³⁷ Quoted by A. P. F. Sell, *Church Planting. A study of Westmorland Nonconformity* (Worthing, 1986), 42.

³⁸ All those named in this paragraph are in *DNB*. See also A. P. F. Sell, "Henry Grove: a Dissenter at the parting of the ways", *Enlightenment and Dissent* iv, (1985), 53-63. For Locke's place in the curriculum of the dissenting academies see H. McLachlan, *English Education under the Test Acts* (Manchester, 1931).

³⁹ See above, n. 15.

⁴⁰ Robert Haldane, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans* (London, 1963), 296 n.